

In May 2002, John V. Hanford III, was sworn in as the second U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. This position, created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, is charged with promoting religious freedom worldwide, promoting reconciliation in those areas where conflict has been implemented along religious lines, and making sure that this issue is woven into the fabric of U.S. foreign policy. Mr. Hanford serves as an Ex-Officio member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Mr. Hanford, originally from Salisbury, North Carolina, attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on a John Motley Morehead Scholarship (BA in Economics) and holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts.

For the past 14 years, Hanford has served as an expert on international religious freedom while working as a Congressional Fellow on the staff of Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana). During that time, he worked at the forefront of efforts to mobilize strong and compassionate intervention through U.S. governmental channels on behalf of persons persecuted for their religious beliefs. Amb. Hanford and Sen. Lugar have led numerous efforts in Congress to address some of the world's most severe problems of religious persecution. Their initiatives have rallied senators, members of Congress, Presidents, and Secretaries of State in successful interventions to halt execution orders, secure the cessation of torture or harassment on religious grounds, gain the release of religious prisoners, or oppose the policies of governments which repress religious freedom.

In 1998, Hanford spearheaded a bipartisan congressional effort to develop a strong and responsible U.S. policy on international religious freedom. Mr. Hanford organized and led the group of offices that co-authored the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). He worked closely with the IRFA's chief sponsor, Senator Don Nickles (R-Oklahoma), and his staff in guiding IRFA through the legislative process to a unanimous (98-0) Senate vote and a unanimous voice vote in the House of Representatives. IRFA ensures U.S. vigilance and an ongoing process of effective action in addressing religious persecution overseas. IRFA is regarded as one of Congress's most significant legislative achievements in human rights. Since the passage of IRFA, the U.S. government's attention to problems of religious persecution has increased significantly. On this and other projects, Hanford has worked closely with a broad spectrum of human rights and religious organizations at home and abroad.

Prior to his work in the Senate, Mr. Hanford served in pastoral ministry on the staff of West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Hopewell, Virginia. Hanford is married to Laura Bryant Hanford.